



PARTNERSHIP FOR REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS Southern Minnesota Creating economic development strategies for regional strength.

Ag & Food | BioScience | Health Care | High Technology | Manufacturing | Renewable Energy

Partner Update

Winter 2011

Inside This Issue...

Success Stories

- Partnership Meeting Held January 27 at MSU
- Bio-Plastic Solutions, LLC Collaborative Efforts

Progress Report

- SAGE Electrochromics Update

Interview

- Colleen Landkamer, USDA Rural Development Director

Announcements

- Minnesota Angel Network Fund Raising
- LinkedIn – Connect to Partners
- Share Your Success Story!

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Partnership Meeting Held January 27 at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Equity Investment and Renewable Energy were the focus areas of the Partnership for Regional Competitiveness meeting held January 27, 2011 at Minnesota State University, Mankato. A total of 70 participants gathered together in the South Ballroom of MSU's Centennial Student Union for the meeting which highlighted stories of collaborative work and successful results from several presenters. Jean Burkhardt, a board member with Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, moderated the program which began with a welcome message from MSU President, Richard Davenport.



Todd Leonard, Executive Director of the Minnesota Angel Network (MNAN) led off the day's speakers. Leonard explained that the network has been established to be a statewide program. *(For more details about this program, see the related article on page 2.)*

BioPlastic Solutions, LLC is a company based in Blooming Prairie that is looking to expand its collaboration efforts. Company CEO, Gary Noble, provided a synopsis of the company and its recent work. *(Learn more about BioPlastic Solutions in the related article on page 4.)*

Next up, Mike Kennedy, CFO of Sage Electrochromics took the audience on a historic tour of the company, from its roots at Rutgers University in New Jersey to its current home in Faribault. *(We introduced SAGE in our last newsletter. Please see a follow-up article on page 2.)*

Glenn Thuringer, Manager of the Worthington Regional Economic Development Corporation invited the audience to the upcoming Seventh Annual Regional Biosciences Conference, Thursday and Friday, April 7-8 at Minnesota West Community & Technical College in Worthington. Three speakers are scheduled for the event: Jack Schultz, founder and CEO of Agracel, Inc., G. Steven Burrill, founder of Burrill & Company, and V. Celeste Carter, representing the National Science Foundation (NSF). Find more information at www.wgtn.net/biosciences/conference/index.htm.



Jean Burkhardt brought the meeting to a close, inviting final comments and questions from the audience. Burkhardt reminded the audience that information is available on the Partnership's website, found at www.southernminnesota.net.

Partner Update: Sage Electrochromics

In the last issue of *Partner Update* we introduced SAGE Electrochromics, Inc., a Faribault company that has been working with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) on grants to fund educational opportunities for its employees. The result of this local partnering has connected SAGE with area colleges and universities to offer training in Six Sigma, Lean, and High Growth High Tech. In the midst of their partnering with local educational institutions a new horizon opened up.

Enter Saint Gobain, a multi-billion-dollar building products company headquartered in Paris, France. The company has been looking to bring together the many facets of its products and focus on commercial and residential construction. It's also one of the top glass companies in the world, and had been, until recently, installing electrochromic moon roofs into Ferraris. Saint Gobain is now focusing its efforts on "going green," which made a partnership with SAGE a perfect fit.

The two companies were the only ones to have a high-quality solid-state electrochromic product for tinting windows and each of them was considering building commercial scale plants. Saint Gobain decided the better route would be to make a strategic investment in SAGE. As a result, Saint Gobain invested \$80 million to help SAGE get a high-volume manufacturing plant up and running.

Saint Gobain also put all of their electrochromic technology into SAGE. So now SAGE has ownership of the entire patent portfolio related to electrochromics. "This gives us a huge platform to work from," states Mike Kennedy, CFO at SAGE.

Another piece of funding for the project will come from a U.S. Department of Energy loan guaranty, which will hopefully be completed in the next few months, to finish the funding and get the new plant operational. "We're always working on government grant activity," explains Kennedy, "because they are a great source to help us advance the technology forward for future applications."

European markets are currently more sophisticated in their use of glass. Saint Gobain committed to specific, minimum guaranteed amounts of product they would purchase from SAGE for use in European construction.

"It's a win-win for us to move this plant forward," concludes Kennedy.



Mike Kennedy

CFO, SAGE Electrochromics

"It's a win-win for us to move this plant forward."



Minnesota Angel Network

Fund Raising to Meet Goals

The Minnesota Angel Network (MNAN), a public-private nonprofit organization hosted by the BioBusiness Alliance of Minnesota, is looking to connect entrepreneurs and startup companies with angel investors throughout Minnesota.

MNAN's process is structured similar to a Six-Sigma program, in which small companies or entrepreneurs can move through a system, guided by mentors, to attain increasing levels of success, ultimately resulting in funding received from the network. The mentors would take a holistic approach, identifying holes in the company's business plan and providing a gap analysis for the company.

The current challenge is that the network is seeking partners, sponsors, and volunteers to aid in the pursuit of raising \$700,000 before July in order to launch the network. Interested parties can contact the network at info@mnan.org, visit their website at www.mnan.org, or contact Executive Director, Todd Leonard at 952-746-3833.



**Colleen
Landkamer**

**State Director for USDA
Rural Development**

*“None of us can
continue to do things
the way we have
always done them.”*



Interview: Colleen Landkamer

How do you see government officials playing a role in the Partnership for Regional Competitiveness?

I believe government officials can really help move regional partnerships forward. We have experienced staff members out in the field who work every day with rural communities who are in touch with the unique needs and challenges of these communities. We're very invested in program delivery and oversight, so with big issues like regionalism, we rely heavily on partners like the Initiative Foundations, Regional Development organizations, and the Partnership for Regional Competitiveness to help identify local needs, work with communities to develop long-term visions, and foster the idea of working together across regions.

What direct impact do you anticipate as a result of the Partnership – for Southern Minnesota, and beyond?

In today's economy it's more important than ever for communities to cooperate and work together on a regional basis. Regionalism sounds so simple in theory, yet is so much more difficult to actually practice. It takes leadership to understand the various tools and resources available to Southern Minnesota communities that have diverse, and sometimes competing, interests. I really believe the Partnership can fill a key role there. It's a huge change, and none of us can continue to do things the way we've always done them. It's a new day!

What benefits for agriculture do you envision the Partnership creating?

Within the local foods movement there is a growing demand nationwide for safe, healthy, and locally-grown foods. The movement has a lot of momentum going right now, but all the pieces have yet to be put in place. The Partnership can help organize the various players involved in the movement in a way that benefits both the producers who grow products, and the end consumers who buy the products.

How do you see the Partnership's future unfolding?

I think as long as the Partnership remains flexible and willing to adapt to the changing needs and challenges facing our rural communities, it has a bright future. This type of open-mindedness is really what is needed in our rural community – learning what people feel their needs are and then trying to figure out how we get there. At this point in time, the question of funding is an issue we're all dealing with, at both the federal level and the state level. The Partnership can also fill a niche there by assisting people in figuring out where the funding is, what is applicable, and what is not.

Did You Know?

LinkedIn Connection

The Partnership for Regional Competitiveness – Southern Minnesota currently has nearly 100 partners who have set up profiles on LinkedIn. Why not increase that total and exchange information, ideas, and opportunities around the Partnership?

LinkedIn is a great way to contact past and present colleagues, make connections when exploring a new business opportunity, or ask questions of industry experts. It's easy to sign up—just go to www.linkedin.com and check it out!

Hope to see you on LinkedIn!

Looking to Collaborate...

Planning for a Greener Future



Blooming Prairie-based company, BioPlastic Solutions, LLC is looking for a few good partners. The company produces plastic products for use in homes and commercial buildings. Now, “going green” has become a significant focus area in their production.

Among the products created by the company are custom based plastic products used in office panels, corner bead for joining sheet rock, and edge banding on

shelves. Corn is a natural product that has proven to enhance items produced by the company through its renewability and clean, low energy processing capabilities. Thus, as a result, the stage is set for cleaner, greener production.

Collaboration will be the key to BioPlastic Solutions’ future, as the building industry was hammered by the recession. Recovery will accelerate through collaboration with investment partners, a process that has already begun. To learn more:

- visit their website at www.bioplasticsolutions.com
- Email Gary Noble at [gnoble@bioplasticsolutions.com](mailto:g noble@bioplasticsolutions.com)
- or call toll-free at 866-874-0097



Gary Noble

CEO, BioPlastic Solutions

BioPlastic
SOLUTIONS

What's Your Story?

So, what's *your* story?

One of the main functions of *Partner Update* is to spread the good news about success stories taking place within our 38-county region. In past issues, we have highlighted partnerships that brought competitors together in collaboration, resulting in increased service to customers and increased revenue for the partners; creative financing stories that have enabled partners to accelerate their businesses; and ways partners have shared resources to cut costs and improve efficiency.

If you have experienced success through collaboration, mutual benefits through partnering, or shared ideas about creative ways to improve your business or your bottom line, we want to let others know about your success! *Partner Update* is the perfect vehicle for getting the word out about ways we can all improve our work and our lives through partnerships.

We are looking for stories to tell, individuals to interview, and photos to share. If you have your own story to share, or if you know of others whose story should be told, please pass the information along to our editorial committee (contact info below), and we will be happy to follow up and check it out. If your piece is chosen for publishing, we will put it into the first available slot (based on timing and space issues).

Please email your ideas, photos, or announcements about upcoming events to Yvonne Simon at ysimon@ruralmn.org or call Yvonne toll-free at 877-RURALMN (877-787-2566).

We look forward to publishing *your* story in an upcoming issue of *Partner Update*!